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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 000318

SIPDIS

NSC FOR MCLEAN
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2012
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: OFR PHASE III - SUCCESS BEYOND
EXPECTATIONS

REF: ABUJA 191

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter; Reasons 1.5 (b/d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Operation Focus Relief Phase III (OFR P3), which trained three Nigerian battalions for UNAMSIL, was successful far beyond expectations. Strikingly different from Phase I of the program, Phase III was successful because of renewed diplomatic efforts, because of personnel changes in the military coupled with reinvigorated civilian leadership in the GON, and because of extremely professional and dedicated Special Forces troops. It is critical at this positive juncture to reinforce success with additional train-and-equip programs. END SUMMARY.

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PHASE I - PULLING TEETH
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2. (C) Myriad problems plagued Phase 1 of Operation Focus Relief in Nigeria. While reports of the behavior and bearing of Phase 1 troops in Sierra Leone are largely positive, particularly when compared to previous iterations of Nigerian peacekeeping, completing Phase 1 felt like the removal of several teeth without novocaine. The military, led by Lieutenant General Malu, was uncooperative and obstructive; false complaints of not being well-briefed and not having approved the training and equipment package were used to delay the program. Tendentious news of the program leaked to the media by Malu and his associates prompted unfavorable editorial comment and conspiracy theories. Pressure from Malu on subordinate elements of the Army meant to delay or even derail the program, for example, slowed human rights vetting for one battalion. This led to the loss of several weeks of training. It was only because the DATT literally pulled the list of names to be vetted out of the hands of a Division Staff Officer that vetting was completed.

3. (C) The April 2001 OFR roundtable meeting arranged to resolve the outstanding issues that had led to Nigeria slipping from Phase 2 to Phase 3 exemplified these problems. Minister of Defense Danjuma did his best to bring agreement between USG requirements for force protection and the purpose of the program and LTG Malu's complaints, but was decidedly unwilling to order his Chief of Army Staff to stand-down. (COMMENT: Due to years of military rule, real civilian oversight of the military has been slow in developing. President Obasanjo and Minister Danjuma strongly supported the program, but Danjuma, and even the Chief of Defense Staff, Admiral Ibrahim Ogohi, carefully avoided confrontation with the Army Chief. END COMMENT.) Ultimately, Danjuma was able to identify enough middle ground (on basing issues, equipment and training) for Phase 3 to proceed in Nigeria, but concerns remained that similar delaying tactics would resurface. (DATT COMMENT: In the end, Malu's untenable position, that Nigerian soldiers were already trained and superior to U.S. soldiers, was forgotten. Training, once an almost forbidden term, is now the term of choice for the Nigerian Army. They cannot get enough. END DATT COMMENT.)

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PHASE 3 - WHAT WENT RIGHT
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4. (C) DIPLOMACY AND CHANGES IN THE GON: The diplomatic effort renewed with the April meeting, coupled with the

appointment of three new Ministers of State for Defense (a Deputy Minister for each service) began the process of putting OFR on the right track. OFR was repeatedly at the top of the Ambassador's talking points with interlocutors. The DCM, DATT and PolMilOff had multiple meetings on OFR with the Minister of Defense, Army Minister, Chief of Defense Staff, Chief of Army Staff, civilian and military staff level officers and others. The Ambassador regularly addressed OFR-related issues in his calls on President Obasanjo and National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed. Moreover, courtesy calls on the new Chief of Air Staff and Chief of Army Staff were used as venues to establish agreement on important aspects of the program, such as the use of the Abuja Air Base for the Forward Operating Base. The Embassy's Public Affairs Section set in motion a media workshop, held in Abuja in June, that brought together nearly all of the field-grade public relations officers of the three services and defense correspondents. The final exercise, led by the Embassy PAO, focused on planning for joint public affairs work for OFR P3. Numerous letters were sent to Embassy interlocutors, from the President down, to ensure that discussions were recorded and decisions noted. Conversations were held with customs and other logistics-focused agencies to ensure smooth operation of the program. This time consuming and strenuous effort was carried out to guarantee that Phase 3 got on track and stayed there.

15. (C) Danjuma's and Batagarawa's task was made significantly easier when President Obasanjo retired the three Service Chiefs in June 2001, including Chief of Army Staff LTG Malu. This action was publicly described as a "normal retirement," but it was clear that his forced retirement was, in large part, due to Malu's insubordination towards the civilian regime. Malu's absence allowed for a sea change in the bilateral military relationship. Cooperation improved tremendously. Increased access to Defense Ministry players and Army leaders allowed for better communication, and pernicious attitudes in discussions disappeared. The search for solutions to obstacles overtook the search for obstacles to solutions. For example, no longer did the Army complain about the training and equipment package; instead, they reasonably suggested that Nigerian Training and Doctrine Command participate at the three training sites, to adjust training if necessary and to inculcate it into doctrine if proven useful.

16. (C) Execution of Phase 3 quickly became a cooperative venture between the GON, Nigerian military and USG. The new Chief of Army Staff, LTG Alexander Ogomudia, warmly welcomed the 3SFG 3 Battalion Commander during his initial visit, approved the POI, addressed concerns of his staff, and even suggested a joint U.S.-Nigerian Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) visit to the Phase 1 troops in Sierra Leone. After stating he had not approved participation of one of the three battalions selected for Phase III, he immediately reversed course and approved their inclusion when he was informed that camp construction had already begun.

17. (C) Phase 1 also clearly sent a message to the Nigerian soldiers that much could be gained from Operation Focus Relief. That message carried, and throughout OFR Phase 3, the GON and Nigerian Army were supportive and flexible: increasing force protection to the U.S. trainers; providing space for a forward operating base; being responsive and supportive of medical evacuation contingencies.

18. (C) While everything appeared to be moving in the right direction on the diplomatic front, OFR Phase 3 could not have been successful without the immense effort put forward by the DATT and his team. As COR for the PA&E contract, and Embassy POC for the 3rd Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group, the DATT oversaw base camp construction and ensured smooth air and ground flow of equipment and personnel. He also established new and strong relationships with Army Operations leadership to ensure that the necessary individuals were constantly engaged (often a problem in Nigeria).

19. (C) Public affairs coordination went smoothly between PAS and the Director of Defense Information. The Embassy's press release on the tent camps being constructed for the program by PA&E -- aimed at disarming the OFR P1-type rumors of a "secret base" -- was praised by leading Nigerian newspapers as unusually open and detailed. After September 11, ambitious plans for public affairs were trimmed for a few weeks in the interest of security and caution. In late November, PAS organized a highly successful Nigerian "media day" so that local journalists could observe mortar training on the range at Kachia. The three graduations were also open to, and well covered by, the media. Stories on OFR written by Jim Fisher-Thompson of IIP's Washington File, were widely run by editors.

110. (C) VERY SPECIAL FORCES: Finally, we cannot say enough about the professionalism of the 3rd Special Forces Group, led by Colonel Mark Phelan and, here in Nigeria, 3rd Battalion led by Lieutenant Colonel Tim Sherwood. While the American and Nigerian ducks were in a row for execution of the program, Phase 3 ultimately depended on the work of the trainers, and their success in establishing camaraderie with the Nigerian battalions. (No one at the graduation ceremony in Serti, watching the Nigerian soldiers do push-ups in full gear as a salute to the American Special Forces trainers could doubt that strong bonds had been formed.)

111. (C) LTC Sherwood's calm demeanor and thoughtfulness, critical to establishing sound working relationships in this culture, epitomized the best of leadership by example. By taking the time to call on state, local and traditional leaders at each of the training sites, the Ambassador, DATT and LTC Sherwood improved force protection for the American soldiers. But this effort also generated understanding and goodwill about USG intent in having American forces on Nigerian soil. This effort was so well received that the Emir of Ilorin invited the SF soldiers to visit him "anytime" for any reason, and the Local Government Chairman in Serti hosted a party for the trainers for which he donated a cow.

112. (C) Two liaison NCO's (LNOs) assigned to the Embassy arrived before the start of Phase 3, and assisted the Embassy with the administrative and logistics burdens of the program. Moreover, becoming integral parts of the Embassy, which is a challenging cultural experience in of itself, these two individuals made a constant effort to assist with Embassy-specific efforts, such as handling diplomatic flights. Working hand-in-hand with the DATT and others, the LNOs played a key role in executing Phase 3.

113. (C) Phase 3 was unfortunately marked by a Light Anti-Tank Weapon (LAW) accident and a spate of malaria. Military deployments have dangers, and despite best efforts, accidents happen. Housing SF troops in tents, unlike the hotels of Phase 1, increased force protection from some threats, but made them more susceptible to malaria. However, because of the able SF leadership on the ground, the sick and injured were quickly treated. Accolades go to the Forward Surgical Team (FST) of the 30th Medical Brigade, who not only ably treated the 3rd Battalion personnel, but also extended medical assistance and taught two first responder courses to the American and British Missions. Demonstrating why the U.S. military is held in such high esteem, the U.S. soldiers of OFR Phase 3 advanced USG goals tremendously.

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COMMENT: THE ROAD AHEAD
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114. (C) The qualitative improvement in the capabilities of the participating Nigerian battalions, coupled with changes in the GON and strenuous diplomatic efforts have helped bring about a sea change in the bilateral relationship. The program also substantiated that the Nigerian Army must go through significant change before it is a viable peacekeeping force and an integral part of Nigerian democracy (part of the reason, no doubt, that the hubris-driven Malu objected to the program). OFR units have now been selected by the GON as model units to show the international community a new side to the generally tarnished image of the Nigerian military. Speaking during the graduation ceremony in Ilorin on December 13, Ambassador Jeter reminded the 222 Battalion that, "Your behavior will be used to measure the legitimacy of the Nigerian Army. That legitimacy will be based on your effort to be a force for good, a force for peace, and a force for the welfare of your people under a democratic dispensation." Echoing his words, Minister of Defense Danjuma told the 222 Battalion that they would be Ambassadors to Sierra Leone representing their Army, their Government and the Nigerian people, and were expected to act appropriately and honorably.

115. (C) Because of the impact of this program, the GON and Nigerian military are now actively seeking more OFR. At all three Phase 3 graduations, a mix of battalion, brigade, division, Army HQ and political leaders publicly urged the USG to train and equip more battalions. President Obasanjo has asked that five more battalions receive OFR-type training, and the Army has indicated that they would like additional training packages to start as soon as January 2002.

116. (C) We are confident that the Phase 3 battalions will be significantly better than those trained in Phase 1 (which

were a large improvement over non-OFR Nigerian battalions), largely due to the active pursuit by the GON and Nigerian Services of what the USG has to offer. Similar training and equipping for Nigerian battalions, with perhaps a longer and more developed POI, could continue at a reasonable cost with great additional benefit. It is too early to determine how long the OFR training will last with the Phase 1 and 3 battalions, and what impact specific training, such as training on human rights, will have on these units as they return to Nigeria or move on to other deployments. However, it is clear that without continued engagement, their skills will decay. OFR was designed solely for the purpose of building sub-regional capacity to deal decisively with the RUF. However, as a program, OFR has resulted in other significant benefits to our bilateral relationship, and to Nigerian governmental and military reform. If engagement is not maintained, a grand opportunity will be lost.

¶17. (C) DATT COMMENT: Planning continues to sustain OFR unit skills through the JCET and MTT programs, although "son-of-OFR" would be the best approach and most decisive. Further engagement is critical. USDAO suggests a reconsideration of the decision not to continue with OFR. Sustaining the capabilities of the OFR units is a Congressional interest item, underscored on three separate occasions by Congressional staffers who were briefed by the DATT.

¶18. (C) DATT COMMENT CONT: Consideration should be given to expanding the force of two battalions and adding a command and control element (e.g. two brigade headquarters), and a logistical capability (e.g. a support group). In Nigeria, they are ready to accept any U.S. proposal. OFR offers an opportunity to build capacity not only for Nigeria, but for ECOWAS as well. There also is an important human rights dimension to this proposal. A well-equipped, trained and sustained Nigerian Army is less likely to commit the atrocities of the past. Thus, for myriad reasons, reinforcing success with further OFR-type train and equip programs is a must. END DATT COMMENT.

Jeter